

# SIGHTINGS

## *joyant* — back from the dead

There's always something interesting going on in the local wooden boat community, but Jeff Rutherford's latest project is really one for the books. He recently began the restoration of a 90-year-old racing boat that hadn't sailed since it sank 25 years ago. In fact, it hadn't even been in the water for 25 years. And that's not the half of it!

*Joyant* was the creation of Nat Herreshoff, and they didn't call him the Wizard of Bristol for nothing. Built in 1911 with then-customary long overhangs (58 feet LOA, 35 feet LWL) to the P Class rule for a Mr. Childs (who owned a chain of coffee shops in New York), *Joyant* immediately showed her heritage by soundly trouncing her peers. In fact, in a still familiar story, she was so good that she almost killed the class. The P Class fathers eventually had to change the rule to make *Joyant* less competitive and new boats more so.

Not much is known of *Joyant* after her brief run of glory except that her rig was changed from gaff to marconi in the late '20s, and she got an engine. After that, she goes off the radar screen for half a century — until she sinks at her mooring off Portland, Maine, in 1975. The then-owner had her raised, but as the crane was swinging her ashore, one of the slings broke and she went down hard on a rocky shore. The fall essentially destroyed her starboard side, and severely injured a man



COURTESY JEFF RUTHERFORD

**Above, 'Joyant' in what Rutherford found out too late was the 'mother lode of poison ivy.' Right, stabilized for the trip west. Below, looking aft. Note the mangled side behind Jeff. The engine will come out for authenticity.**







who had been standing on her deck. The boat was again lifted, hastily blocked up, and there she sat for a year or two until some enterprising furniture makers met the owner at a cocktail party. They specialized in furniture made from old structures, so bought her for all of \$10 with the intention of cutting her up for the wood. And wouldn't that rudder make a lovely coffee table?

It took the furniture guys about a year to stabilize the boat and get her trucked to the lot behind their Cape Cod shop. They 'paid' the truck driver by giving him the 12,000-lb lead keel, which he sold as scrap for more than \$3,000. For all their effort, however, the furniture men didn't realize how difficult it was to get a boat with both inner and outer planking (with bronze strapping in between) apart. Though there was certainly decent wood left in her oak frames, cedar inner planking and Douglas fir outer planking, it was simply too difficult to get to. To add insult to

injury, her rudder disappeared somewhere along the way and never did get made into that coffee table. This was now 1978. The furniture builders simply turned their backs and walked away.

Fast forward 22 years. Rutherford, whose Boat Shop in Richmond has specialized in wooden boat building and repair for almost 20 years, had put the word out that one of his clients, Bob McNeil, had been looking for an old gaff-rigged racing yacht to refurbish for a while, so every time Jeff talked to anyone who might know something, he mentioned it. Turns out a supplier of blocks and other traditional gear he'd used for one of his own boats (see 'First Boat of the New Year, Sightings, February, 2000) remembered *Joyant*. Jeff and Nick Brown went back to look her over last June. The first order of business was to hack away all the bushes so they could actually find her. . . .

"It was horrendous," says Jeff. "A lot worse than I expected. The bottom of the boat was filled with about 2 feet of compost covered with raccoon crap and there was so much poison ivy it put both of us in the hospital!" he laughs.

"I called up Bob and told him there was nothing there. At the time I doubted we could save anything." But McNeil (who recently sold the R/P 75 *Zephyrus IV*), was intrigued by the *Joyant's* history and opted to go ahead with the project anyway. Rutherford hired three college kids to clean her out and, in September, spent two weeks on the Cape building a cradle so she'd survive the truck trip across the country. *Joyant* arrived in California just after Thanksgiving, and work has been progressing rapidly ever since.

"Our goal is to participate in the Master Mariners Regatta in 2002, which is only 15 months away, so yeah, we're going gangbusters," says Jeff.

Happily, as the boat was disassembled and a framework male 'mold' constructed to help her regain the correct shape (using Herreshoff's original plans, drawings and notes), Rutherford discovered that more was salvageable than he first thought, including some lovely grown knees of hackmatack and the sheer clamps. Still, 95% of the new *Joyant* will be new wood — which, yes, essentially means the brand new boat will use some pieces from the old one. A Cape Codder who stripped most of the original bronze hardware off the boat has promised to hold onto it for the time being. "He said if we finish the boat, he'll sell it to us," Jeff says.

Such a unique project will have a unique ending. After the Master Mariners, the boat that was born in New England and reborn on the West Coast will return across country to her old haunts. She'll live at anchor off McNeil's waterfront home in Maine and race regularly in classic yacht races on the East Coast and possibly in Europe.

Look for updates in these pages as the *Joyant* project progresses.

